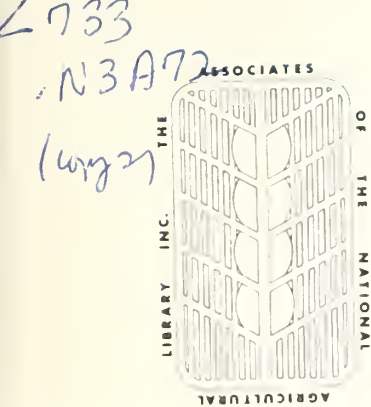


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# JOURNAL OF NAL ASSOCIATES

NEW SERIES VOL. 9, NOS. 1/4

JANUARY/DECEMBER 1984



GERMAN-AMERICAN AGRICULTURE AND FOLK CULTURE

The Associates of the National Agricultural  
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SYMPOSIUM ON GERMAN-AMERICAN  
AGRICULTURE AND FOLK CULTURE

EDITED BY:  
Alan E. Fusonie  
Donna Jean Fusonie

Editorial Assistant:  
Mary L. Silva

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Cover Photo: Alfred Pelster, 79-year old grandson  
of William Pelster, stands near housebarn with  
early photo of the housebarn.



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## FOREWORD

There is something really fascinating to me about the transfer of cultural traditions from the old world to the new. Throughout rural America, if one travels down the backroads, one can still find dotting the agricultural landscape, that time honored symbol of stability, beauty, and family enterprise--the great barns. In a very real sense, we are indebted to the immigrant farmers and carpenters who, over the last three centuries, applied their knowledge, skill, and determination to the betterment of the new nation.

In particular, the publication of these symposium papers on "German-American Agriculture and Folk Culture" inclusive of a selective list of articles on "Our Rural German-American Heritage" and a photo illustrated write-up on the opening at NAL of the traveling exhibit "The German Housebarn in America: Object and Image" illustrates a uniquely rich aspect of our agricultural heritage. This special issue of the Journal of the NAL Associates provides an interesting and informative historical facet on German immigrants in America--their successes and contributions in agriculture throughout the United States.

Let me take this opportunity to also render a special thanks to the University of Missouri Cultural Heritage Center, the Missouri State Society, Bueschers Industries, Inc. (corn cob pipes), Edelweiss Winery, Bardenheiers Wine Cellars, The American Folklife Center, the Blue Ridge Institute, and the German Heritage Society of Greater Washington for their support of the symposium and the opening of the German Housebarn exhibit at NAL.

This symposium on "German-American Agriculture and Folk Culture" is the Associates first contribution from the new Special Collections Lecture Series in Agricultural History and I compliment the editorial staff of the Associates NAL, Inc., a nonprofit friends of the library organization.

JOSEPH H. HOWARD, Director  
National Agricultural Library



## INTRODUCTION

From September 24 to November 30, a unique and attractive traveling exhibition called, "The German Housebarn in America: Object and Image" opened in the Washington, D.C. area at the National Agricultural Library for a 2-month engagement. This well designed 13 panel exhibit includes many historic photographs of the Pelster housebarn--a German-American landmark in Missouri, as well as photographs of related family farm life, rural communities, schools, churches, social life, and the agricultural landscape.

The Pelster housebarn can be seen as a reflection of the creative behavior of its builder, William Pelster, a man who in the words of Dr. Howard W. Marshall, Director of the Missouri Cultural Heritage Center, combined "house" and "barn" (bridging) "past and present" in a re-enactment of a "European environment on his American homestead." Originally developed to celebrate the tricentennial of German immigration to America, this traveling exhibit of a unique Germanic "housebarn" in rural Missouri is in a very real sense an enduring tribute to the success and contribution of the German-American family farm throughout the United States.

The viewers of this exhibit were able to experience the spirit of cooperation and community labor inputs essential to the process of building the Pelster housebarn. As one moved past the sequence of panels, the concept and purpose of this unique multi-level housebarn accommodating all aspects of farm life--family, farm animals, agricultural products were illuminated. The exhibit also provided a human dimension insight into the push and pull of 19th century immigration to the United States. People who left their native land did so for many reasons. During the 1830s and 40s, German (Hannoverian) immigrants were attracted to the eastern Missouri landscape as an escape from the political, economic, and military hardships (pushing factors on the European side) of the Old World.

In particular, the migration of Frederick (Phillip Friedrich) Pelster, his wife, Maria Katherine, and their 17-year old son, William (Friedrich Wilhelm) to America in 1842 from the village of Dissen, near Osnabruck in the Hannover region of northern Germany, seems to have involved in part the pull factor of positive information about Missouri and the push of adverse economic or political conditions at home.

Today in Franklin County, one finds German-American farmers continuing the family farm tradition on acreage owned by earlier generations of their families.

In addition to the housebarn exhibit, there was a special rare book exhibit on "Early German Agricultural Practices," which included agricultural and botanical works from 16th and 17th century and farm artifacts on loan from the Blue Ridge Institute, Ferrum, Virginia.

The opening day festivities began with an afternoon symposium: Symposium on German-American Agriculture and Folk Culture. The symposium was followed by a grand opening for the German Housebarn Exhibit inclusive of speakers, donated German wine, corn cobb pipes, and music. This symposium produced an informative and useful group of scholarly papers which are published here in the Journal of the NAL Associates, along with a list of relevant articles and special collection of exhibit opening photographs.

There were many supportive hands involved in the ultimate success of the special program and journal issue. A special debt of gratitude to the attendees and speakers for their participation.

ALAN E. FUSONIE  
DONNA JEAN FUSONIE  
Editors

AMERICAN AGRICULTURE:  
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GERMAN-AMERICANS

by

DOUGLAS E. BOWERS\*

Of all the ethnic groups to settle in the United States over the last 300 years, probably none has received as much attention in the field of agriculture as the Germans. The reputation of German-American farmers has been an exceedingly good one. Indeed, from the time of their first settlement in Pennsylvania three centuries ago, a stereotype has grown up about the character and methods of German-American farmers that has persisted to this day. Farmers of German ancestry, it has been said, were uniformly hard working and frugal. They took good care of their livestock, keeping them fenced and building large barns to provide winter protection. They also took good care of the land--they manured the fields, practiced crop rotation, and carefully rooted out stumps and stones. Rather than plunging into the wilderness, they adopted a conservative approach, buying land that had already been improved and seeking out the sort of rich limestone soil they were familiar with in Germany. According to one standard history of German-Americans by Albert Faust, of all the national groups to settle America, "there is none whose record has been so

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U.S. Department of Agriculture.

consistent for so long a time. The German, throughout a period of over two centuries, has proved himself the most successful farmer in the United States."<sup>1</sup> By contrast, many other American farmers before this century had a reputation for wasteful farming, especially the English and Scotch-Irish. Lured by the seemingly endless bounty of cheap virgin land, many of these farmers exploited the soil, cleared fields the easy way by girdling trees and planting around the stumps, grew one or two cash crops year after year until the soil was exhausted, and then moved on to fresh land. For many years, until the development of agricultural societies in the nineteenth century and the later appearance of state and federal experiment stations, only a few gentlemen or "book" farmers took a serious interest in improving their farming techniques.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, the view that German farmers in America were truly unique, not to mention superior, has come under attack. Other ethnic groups, of course, have had a good reputation as farmers--Scandinavians, Orientals, and Italians, for example. Moreover, the impetus for improving agriculture came far more from England than Germany. But the most serious challenge has been from historians who stress the influence of environment over culture. The most important of these, James T. Lemon, has contended in his study of eighteenth century farming in southeastern Pennsylvania that "differences in customs and practices associated with national groups have...been misstated or exaggerated far out of proportion to their significance."<sup>3</sup> Lemon found German farmers to be little different from British farmers, especially sectarians such as the Quakers. The Germans were neither as good nor the British as poor at farming as usually depicted.<sup>4</sup>

So just how unique were the Germans and what did they contribute to American agriculture? A look at German farmers in different parts of the United States and at different times suggests that there may, indeed, be much truth in the old stereotype. The Germans, of course, came from different parts of Europe--the rolling Palatinate, the mountains of Switzerland, the flat plains of Russia, for example. And they settled in widely different parts of the United States, where they necessarily had to adapt to a new climate, new crops, and new markets. In other words, there was not one German experience in the United States but many. But Germans from different areas and different periods of time brought with them certain common traits which tended to persist regardless of where they settled. For one thing, most of them had been small farmers. In fact, a prime reason for their leaving Germany was that the continual subdivision of farms among heirs had made many farms too small to be economically viable. Because they were small farmers, they were also intensive farmers. They put nearly every square foot of soil to work, rotating crops and manuring to maintain fertility. Rather than grow a single cash crop, they planted a highly diversified array of grains, root crops and other vegetables, grapes and fruit trees. Livestock played an essential role in German farming not only in the production of meat but also in keeping the farm supplied with manure. German farmers were noted for their barns, many under the same roofs as their houses; in some parts of Germany animals were kept in barns the entire year. Along with all this came an innate conservatism--a distrust of change, a belief in hard work, thriftiness, and a desire to maintain strong family ties. These qualities tended to remain with Germans even generations after they migrated to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Probably the best way to understand the German influence on American agriculture is to look at a few different examples of German settlements. The Germans came to the United States in several distinct waves. The first wave, largely destined for Pennsylvania, lasted most of the eighteenth century and involved both dissenting religious groups, such as the Mennonites and German Baptists, and those who came to better their economic conditions. Most of these immigrants were from the Palatinate and other areas near the Rhine; in America, they spread out from Pennsylvania down the western valleys of Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. After 1815, a new wave began that accelerated in the 1840's due to famine, economic problems, and the revolutions of 1848. These settlers came not only to the Northeast but also to the West and South, often landing in New Orleans and taking the steamboat to such destinations such as St. Louis and Cincinnati. Texas and the Old Northwest also received German immigrants. In the late nineteenth century immigration picked up again, much of it from areas other than the Rhine, including ethnic Germans from as far away as Russia. They often settled as groups in such widely scattered places as Alabama, the Dakotas, and Colorado. German immigrants fell off sharply after the turn of the century. By 1900, 5.3 million Americans had at least one German parent and the figure for the total German ethnic population would be much larger than that.<sup>6</sup>

The first German settlers arrived in Pennsylvania in 1683 and, by the mid-eighteenth century, made up about half of the colony's population. They carried with them the labor-intensive, diversified agriculture of their homeland. But, as Lemon has pointed out, they had to make immediate adaptations because of their new environment. Land needed to be cleared and

buildings built, the first ones often log cabins. Because land was cheap by European standards, farms were comparatively large and the idea of living in villages, as in the old country, quickly died. Germans soon adopted American style rail fences and planted crops, such as wheat and corn, similar to those of other settlers. Also, there is little evidence that they confined themselves to limestone soils or avoided the new land of the frontier.<sup>7</sup>

But the Pennsylvania Germans also retained much of their cultural heritage and, as they settled in, this became increasingly evident in both the appearance and operation of their farms. Architecturally, of course, German farms in America looked different from those in Germany because they were not concentrated in villages but scattered individually across the countryside. Also, with perhaps a few exceptions, Pennsylvania Germans gave up the idea of combining house and barn in one building. What did develop in Pennsylvania, though, showed a distinctively German influence--impressive stone barns with doors wide enough to admit a fully loaded wagon, plain but comfortable houses, and occasional survivals from medieval architecture, such as arched cellars, half-timbered (fachwerk) walls, and high pitched roofs. Often the barn was built before the permanent house, a tribute to the importance of livestock.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to many other American farmers who made few improvements, sold at a small profit, and moved on, Germans built to stay and they were willing to invest the labor and capital necessary to keep productivity high. Along with the use of manure, Germans also practiced crop rotation and some made efforts to conserve soil on hillsides. They worked steadily, lived simply, and were reluctant to go into debt. Before long, Pennsylvania German agriculture was winning high praise from nearly everyone who saw it. As a French visitor

commented in 1788, "the Germans are regarded as the most honest, most industrious, and most economical of farmers."<sup>9</sup> The conservation of German farmers, though, which made them so relatively self-sufficient and prosperous in the eighteenth century, tended to retard their acceptance of innovation when English agricultural reform began to have an effect on American agriculture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The German experience in Wisconsin shows a similar picture in a different setting. By the mid-nineteenth century, a new wave of German immigrants was coming to America, one motivated almost entirely by economic considerations, such as the subdivision of farms.<sup>10</sup> Coming in the 1840's and 1850's mainly from southern and central Germany, their pattern of settlement in Wisconsin was strikingly different from that of Anglo-Americans from New England and New York. While Yankees set out adventurously for the open prairie and lands which had been heavily speculated in, Germans clustered in wooded areas near water transportation on lands which they could obtain cheaply from the government. Since they were used to small farms, the Germans worried little about the fact that only a few acres a year could be cleared. Indeed, while their holdings were generally much greater than in Europe, the experience of clearing new land only reinforced their belief in intensive agriculture. They grubbed out trees by the roots, preferring to cultivate the land properly in small units rather than girdle a large acreage and wait for years for the stumps to decay. Wisconsin Germans, like those in Pennsylvania, built substantial barns to house their livestock and used the resulting manure on their fields. They also practiced diversified farming, though in the 1870's and 1880's they tended to join Yankee farmers in the heavy use of wheat as a

cash crop. It was the Yankee who pioneered in improving livestock and in switching from wheat to dairying in the 1890's. But Germans, with their long emphasis on livestock, were able to convert to dairying easily.<sup>11</sup>

In the South, Germans found conditions quite unlike those of their countrymen in the North and often radically different from those in Germany. Southern agriculture involved not only different crops and a different climate but also different systems of labor and landholding. Instead of wheat, southern agriculture emphasized cash crops like cotton and corn; labor was performed by slaves or free blacks as well as whites and, after the Civil War, many farmers became tenants instead of landowners. Moreover, southern agricultural practices generally lagged behind those of the North. In short, the South provided a more challenging test of whether German-style agriculture could survive in the New World. Germans seem to have made more adaptations to American conditions in the South than the North, yet many recognizably German traits were retained.

Germans who migrated south from Pennsylvania down the Shenandoah Valley in the eighteenth century followed a style of agriculture similar to Pennsylvania and generally kept their distinctive culture, at least for a few generations.<sup>12</sup> Germans who entered Texas in the mid-nineteenth century, on the other hand, had a much different experience from the start. Earlier immigrants, who went to East Texas, found a cotton culture similar to other parts of the South. They quickly began raising corn and cotton like other southern farmers. Because of the warm climate, they abandoned the idea of sheltering livestock over the winter and this, in turn, meant they used manure much less than in most other German settlements.

Later, immigrants moved to the plains of West Texas where they found a near desert climate. Germans here had to make many changes in their agriculture, including the replacement of their traditionally scrupulous livestock care with open range management. Nevertheless, many German agricultural traits survived in Texas. Terry Jordan, who did a particularly careful study of German farmers in Texas, has shown, like Lemon in Pennsylvania, that Germans there assimilated with the prevailing culture more than commonly believed. Nevertheless, Jordan found many characteristically German practices which were successfully continued in Texas, including more intensive farming than other Texans, a high degree of land ownership, and a more stable and more family-oriented farm population. There were also certain minor crops that the Germans stubbornly persisted in producing in Texas despite unfavorable conditions--grains, white potatoes, small grains, and cheese, for example. Moreover, Jordan found something he refers to as "cultural rebound"--the reappearance of German traits years after settlement. In this category were certain crops, like rye and white potatoes, and the German-style half timbered architecture which showed up in some farm buildings a generation or so after settlement. Texas Germans were also more reluctant to own slaves and generally had smaller farms than other settlers.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1880's another German migration focused on Cullman County, Alabama, encouraged by railroad promotional literature. The Germans who came to this newly opened area fully expected to continue their traditional style of agriculture. But Cullman County soil was too poor and sandy to support the crops, such as wheat, most fruits, and root vegetables, that they were used to; nor was the soil easily improved by manure. Instead the Germans, like their Anglo-American neighbors, turned to cotton culture and

commercial fertilizers. But the Germans, even into the 1930's, remained much different from other county residents. They resisted the nearly exclusive reliance on cotton that characterized that part of the South. Within a few years they had established a diversified agriculture based not only on cotton but also on strawberries, brought in from a German colony in Cincinatti, and sweet potatoes, a southern crop whose commercial potential had been ignored by other farmers. They also grew some grapes for homemade wine and kept livestock, preferring horses to mules. As elsewhere, the Germans maintained close family ties, worked long hours, usually owned their farms, and avoided debt. By the 1930's, the Germans were clearly better off than their neighbors and they had made Cullman County the leading agricultural county in the state.<sup>14</sup>

These four examples, from Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Texas, and Alabama, show only some of the diversity of conditions that German immigrants to the United States encountered. Many other examples could be given, most of them success stories. Nineteenth century immigrants revived the worn out soils of Franklin County, Tennessee, established a thriving truck farming business in Copiah County, Mississippi, became successful ranchers in the Dakotas, and sugarbeet growers in California.<sup>15</sup> Wherever they went, they had to make some changes to meet the needs of their new environment. Most of these changes involved new crops or new methods suited to local conditions. Their basic approach to farming, though, changed very little. Regardless of where they settled, Germans were known as hard working and thrifty farmers who put self sufficiency of the family farm above the desire to make money quickly. They avoided the temptations of land speculation and exploitation of the soil and instead put their efforts into making permanent improvements

on land that they intended to hold for generations. They also attempted, with varying degrees of success, to grow the crops they were familiar with in Germany. They were, in short, traditionalists rather than innovators. Indeed, the technological advances in nineteenth century American agriculture--new machinery, fertilizers, crops, and livestock--were carried out with little help from Germans. To be sure, some individual Germans stood out as innovators, for example Johann Schwerdkopf, who introduced commercial strawberry growing on Long Island, and George Husmann of Missouri, who was important in grape culture.<sup>16</sup> But for the most part, Germans excelled at traditional farming which respected and replenished the soil and put the welfare of the farm family first. They were less interested in trying new things than in building on what they already had.

Differences between German-Americans and other farmers persisted well into the twentieth century. A study of the Missouri Ozarks done in 1940 found that "the German farmers have attained economic stability and moderate prosperity, whereas neighboring groups in similar physical settings eke out a precarious existence and have been a serious load on government relief agencies."<sup>17</sup> In Cullman County, Alabama during the same period, it was said Anglo-American farmers could often be found lounging around town while their German neighbors were back working their fields.<sup>18</sup> Today, after half a century of dramatic changes in American agriculture, it is often difficult to distinguish the descendants of German farmers from those of other nationalities, except in the case of a few religious sects like the Amish who have kept to the old ways. But the concern of German-American farmers for the conservation of natural resources and high regard they had for the family farm have been an enduring legacy that can still be appreciated today.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Percy W. Bidwell and John I. Falconer, History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860 (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1925), 84-89, 115-121, 259-265, 448-452; Paul W. Gates, The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860 (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 3-5.

<sup>2</sup>Albert B. Faust, The German Element in the United States (New York: Arno Press, 1969; orig. pub. 1927), II, 31. See also Richard H. Shryock, "British Versus German Traditions in Colonial Agriculture," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 26 (June 1939), 39-54 and Homer T. Rosenberger, The Pennsylvania Germans, 1891-1965 (Lancaster: Pennsylvania German Society, 1966), 329-359.

<sup>3</sup>James T. Lemon, The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1976; orig. pub. 1972), 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 13-18, 63-64, 177, 183, 188-189. Another study emphasizing environmental factors is Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland (Urbana, University of Illinois, 1926).

<sup>5</sup>Marcus Lee Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860: A History of The Continuing Settlement of the United States (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961; orig. pub. 1940), 211-219, 284-290; Schafer, "Yankee and Teuton," 272-275.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1975), II, 116; Hansen, Atlantic Migration, 46-50, 80-81, 86-87, 186-195, 252-254, 274-276, 284-290.

<sup>7</sup>Stevenson W. Fletcher, Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, 1640-1840 (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1950), 46-51; Amos Long, Jr., The Pennsylvania German Family Farm: A Regional Architectural and Folk Cultural Study of an American Agricultural Community (Breinigsville: Pennsylvania German Society, 1972), 57; Lemon, Best Poor Man's Country, 63-64, 69; Edward Lay, "European Antecedents of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Germanic and Scots-Irish Architecture in America," Pennsylvania Folklife 32 (Autumn 1982), 4.

<sup>8</sup>Long, Pennsylvania German Family Farm, 1-14, 73, 85-86; Lay, "European Antecedents," 6-43. The Pennsylvania German style of forebay barn also influenced Germans in the west, such as in Wisconsin. See Robert F. Ensminger, "A Comparative Study of Pennsylvania and Wisconsin Forebay Barns," Pennsylvania Folklife 32 (Spring 1983), 98-114.

<sup>9</sup>Fletcher, Pennsylvania Agriculture, 51.

<sup>10</sup>Hansen, Atlantic Migration, 80-81, 86-87, 211-219.

<sup>11</sup>Joseph Schafer, "The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin," Wisconsin Magazine of History 6 (Dec. 1922, March 1923), 3-23, 261-279; Oscar F. Hoffman, "Cultural Change in a Rural Wisconsin Ethnic Island," Rural Sociology 14 (March 1949), 39-50.

<sup>12</sup>See for example Shryock, "British Versus German Traditions," 39-54 in Virginia and William H. Gehrke, "The Ante-Bellum Agriculture of the Germans in North Carolina," Agricultural History 9 (April 1935), 143-160.

<sup>13</sup>Terry G. Jordan, German Seed in Texas Soil: Immigrant Farmers in Nineteenth-Century Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 192-203.

<sup>14</sup>Walter M. Kollmorgen, The German Settlement in Cullman County, Alabama (Washington: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, BAE, June 1941), 9, 18-26; J. Allen Tower and Walter Wolf, "Ethnic Groups in Cullman County, Alabama," Geographical Review 33 (April 1943), 276-285.

<sup>15</sup>Walter M. Kollmorgen, "Immigrant Settlements in Southern Agriculture; A Commentary on the Significance of Cultural Islands in Agricultural History," Agricultural History 19 (April 1945), 69-78; Richard Sallet, Russian-German Settlements in the United States (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974), 79-80; Faust, German Element, 49-52.

<sup>16</sup>Faust, German Element, 43-45; Heinz Kloss, Research Possibilities in the German-American Field ed. by LaVern J. Rippley (Hamburg: Helmut BuskeVerlag, 1980; orig. pub. 1937), 151.

<sup>17</sup>Arthur B. Cozzens, "Conservation in German Settlements of the Missouri Ozarks," Geographical Review 33 (April 1943), 286.

<sup>18</sup>Tower and Wolf, "Ethnic Groups in Cullman County," 282-285.





Interior of the housebarn showing the Fachwerk (half-timbering) construction technique.

# GERMAN-AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE ON THE MISSOURI FRONTIER: THE PELSTER HOUSEBARN

by

HOWARD W. MARSHALL\*

## 1. Introduction

In the pressure for assimilation, we observe that immigrants often put aside traditional systems of thought and behavior. Yet manifestations of ethnic and national culture endure. Provided with ethnographic factors framed to explain cultural-geographic continuity as well as changing time, we see the legacy of the Old World transplanted dynamically in the New.

Here the subject of German housebarns in America is taken up while focusing on a famous example built by Hannoverians in the Germanic "Rhineland" along the Missouri River on the margin of the Ozarks.

The William Pelster housebarn is an intriguing structure housing animals, agricultural activities, the produce and equipment of harvest, and the members of the farm family in spaces inside a single building. It represents the ultimate appearance of a concept familiar in Europe through a thousand years of history. This Missouri housebarn can be seen as a reflection of the creative behavior of its builder, William Pelster, a man whose combined "house" and "barn" bridged past and present in a re-enactment

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of a European environment on his American homestead. Though other housebarns may have been built in Missouri, no others are known or survive. Before commenting upon the significance of the Pelster housebarn, however, a discussion of the evolution and broader subject of housebarns is in order.

While it would seem that such traditions as housing man and beast under one roof had been set aside, German immigrant farmers did build housebarns in the Midwest. Barn-building is no haphazard process; it reassembles the familiar architectural framework from previous experiences yet incorporates American expectations into the farmer's emerging regional culture. A common feature on the European landscape by the time of Germanic emigration, housebarns continued to be built on the Continent as worthy shelter well into the twentieth century. For Americans, the study of housebarns brings to mind that many immigrants found pleasure and purpose in keeping certain of the old patterns working, patterns that may seem out of tune with "American" attitudes and conditions.

A housebarn is a single structure combining the residence and many work activities of the family farm. There are spaces inside for sheltering people, livestock (milk cows, horses, mules), and the harvest of field, garden, and orchard.

There are many varieties of dual-purpose buildings in Europe in which the "housebarn" principle is visible. Whether dual-purpose structures in the British Isles (longhouses, bastles, and laithe-houses), north European and Low Country hall houses, or the banked housebarns of central, western, and southern Germany, Switzerland, and alpine Italy, the basic formula

appeared according to local taste, ethnic and regional custom, social and economic organization, and geographic conditions. In ancient Greece and Rome, in Spain, Scandinavia, Russia, Britain, and Ireland as well as the Germanic countries, the housebarn concept proved suitable for generations of farmers.

While housebarns remained logical to Europeans, in America people stopped living in this closely confined habitation with draft animals, chickens, milk cows, and crops. The advantages of the housebarn were not sufficiently compelling to cause their continuation here; geographic abundance, a penchant for individualism, freedom, and a search for privacy and comfort may have contributed to the disappearance of the tradition.

Whether or not a subliminal assertion of control over the Howling Wilderness, the threatening frontier environment as yet incompletely tamed, the reasons for this pulling-apart of the housebarn are aesthetic, functional, personal. Of the many German-speaking immigrant builders and farmers familiar with housebarns, all but a few chose to separate the housebarn form (or build European-based separate structural types) on their new farmsteads.

A look at studies of European vernacular building suggests the rewarding work yet to be done in locating comparative materials for American housebarn analyses. Support is available for the contention that the Pelster housebarn is middle or southwestern German in type, and there are examples of housebarn construction suggesting the Pelster housebarn's half-timbering. We believe that it combines a southwest European plan with a north European construction tradition.

The German-language terms that predominate for the English-language term "housebarn" are Wohnstallhaus and Einhaus. The term that the Pelsters and other Missouri German-Americans use for the central threshing floor or

haullway--Diele--is generally replaced by the more specific term Tenne in the Germanic scholarly studies.

## 2. In America

In America, the known examples of Germanic housebarns are found in the Midwest and Great Plains and were erected by different groups of German-speaking immigrants from central Europe. The dozen or so housebarn-like structures which survive--there were never many--are located in Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Texas.

No housebarns have survived in the Germanic culture hearths of Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic. Records indicate that at least one Moravian settler in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, built a housebarn-like structure, but it no longer stands; that curious building, supposed to have been built in 1741, exists only in a drawing made from memory by a German visitor named Grider. The drawing indicates a log house with attached stable and may have been the transplantation of a haus stahl type familiar to the Moravians; it bears no resemblance to the Pelster housebarn.

The Midwest housebarns can be seen as unusual examples built by settlers with special motivations. In the Dakotas, the Great Plains, and Texas, there are Germanic buildings that seem to be true housebarns, but they, like the connected farmsteads in New England, are not. They are attached individual structures, with house and barn or shed attached end to end.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin have done much to call housebarns to the world's attention. Richard Perrin brought the Langholff housebarn to its status as the best-known American housebarn. William Tishler and Christopher Witmer described Wisconsin housebarns at the 1982 Vernacular Architecture Forum meeting and fortified my thesis that

housebarns were generally rejected in America. They examined six known Wisconsin housebarns and reached the following conclusions:

(1) housebarns were rarely built in America, though common in Europe; (2) some conservative Lutheran Germans preferred housebarns in the 1850s in one Wisconsin region; (3) housebarns seem to be the first structures erected by the builders and were vacated when a separate house was erected later; (4) the plans follow traditional rectangular European shapes; (5) the dwelling section was usually located nearest the roadway and contained "refinements lacking in the barn area"--more windows, better details, and the like; and (6) three of the housebarns contain a hall or alcove separating the barn section from the dwelling section.

In South Dakota, Michael Koop and Stephen Ludwig documented housebarn-like structures in the southeastern prairie region settled by German-speaking Russians (Volga Germans), Ukrainians, and Mennonites. In those housebarns, the barn section is attached to the gable and away from the main room or parlor, in this way resembling British longhouses. These examples are conceptually distant from the vast and complicated "true" housebarns of Wisconsin and Missouri, and are simply low single-pen structures attached end to end in reaction to environment and climate as much as to European tradition. Similarly, a "house" in west-central North Dakota, reported by Andrew Gulliford, is a German-Russian building in which the barn section is simply added onto the gable of the house proper. In Nebraska, David Murphy located a Bohemian log "housebarn" made by adding a barn to the gable end of the dwelling as in the South and North Dakota instances. German Mennonites in Marion County, Kansas, built a stone single-story building that is, like the Nebraska and South Dakota structures, more like a British longhouse in form than what we call true housebarns. And while there are housebarns in the prairie provinces of Canada, the final example in this preliminary inventory of American cases

is in the Texas Hill Country. The 1850 building is a triple-pen log building with two dogtrot breezeways separating the sections. Once more, the building would not seem to be a true housebarn.

### 3. The Pelster Housebarn as Object

The Missouri housebarn was built by Friedrich Wilhelm ("William") Pelster (1825-1908), a self-reliant, German-American plattdeutsch Lutheran farmer. Pelster came to Franklin County from the village of Dissen, near Osnabrück, Hanover, with his parents at the age of seventeen in 1842. After working in a clay mine in St. Louis, young Pelster purchased farm property 4 miles west of his parents' homeplace. The housebarn is located 10 miles south of the Missouri River in the part of Missouri many immigrants imagined might become the "new Germania."

Among the earliest settlers to Missouri directly from Germany were many from Osnabrück in the late 1820s. French hunters and traders, and then Anglo-American townsmen and farmers settled in Franklin County about 1800, and then Gottfried Duden's famous "report," painting the Missouri frontier in inviting hues, fostered organized and individualistic German immigration. To this day, following the displacement of the early Anglo-American influence, towns like Washington and New Haven are almost entirely German-American. The use of "Missouri Rhineland" for the Germanic settlement landscape from St. Louis west along the river to Boonville (mostly on the southern, Ozark side of the Missouri River) is apt.

The Pelster housebarn's rural neighborhood lies on margin where the fertile loess-capped river hills and alluvial bottomlands blend into the steeper, rockier Ozark hills. Franklin County borders the Missouri and much of its terrain is ridge-and-valley topography formerly covered with sparse hardwood forests interspersed with glades and small prairies. Early on, German settlers took up mediocre hill land that earlier Anglo-American

settlers had passed over. The few original stands of hard pine were harvested in the nineteenth century, the hardwood forests cut over and now the ambitious red cedar is taking over untended and fallow fields.

The Pelster housebarn mirrors this regional cultural landscape with Germanic personality, not only in its form and construction but in its site arrangement as well. Its position some distance from the county road, on the cleared mid-slope of a hill above tilled lowground and below the ridge-top woods is typical of 19th century German-American farmstead location, site arrangement, and vernacular environment in Missouri. In the ridge and hill lands, Pelster banked his housebarn as other farmers had done, acknowledging orientation and judging the small portion of flatter ground more appropriate for tillage than for architecture. Building up the side of the hill also kept the family away from drafts and low ground where the damp collected and ailments flourished. In the second generation of agricultural builders, William Pelster profited from the experiences of earlier settlers, many of whom experimented with bottomland farmstead siting and found it unsuitable and unhealthy, as well as potentially wasteful of good planting ground. This kind of site preference is important; across the Missouri River in the generally more productive agricultural environment of the Anglo-American region called Little Dixie, this distinction is not as clear nor obvious.

The Pelster housebarn is a handsome example not only of the old architectural principle, but also of the persistence of Germanic half-timbering (Fachwerk) construction.

The housebarn contains three basic units of space. But rather than stabling cattle and storing hay, the left or south third became the "house," with cellar below. The housebarn is today called both "the Pelster barn" and "the Pelster house." Both terms are acceptable but "housebarn" is more the term of outsiders. Alfred Pelster said in 1983 that there was no

plattdeutsch word for "housebarn," but offered a term in translation "haus stahl" (meaning "house and stall"). The Pelster family always called it simply "the house" but Alfred remembers Grandpa had a plattdeutsch word for the building that was lost through the years.

With its stone basement level and three heavy timber stories above, the housebarn appears much like Germanic and Anglo-American barns across much of the East and Midwest. It is only when one looks carefully that the south end of this "barn" emerges as a dwelling complete with front porch, six-light windows, and stove chimneys.

The two other sections are the great hall (Diele) where wagons unloaded hay and crops for storage--and where the Pelsters later parked their automobiles--and the cribs and granaries in the north third of the building. The stone "basement" contains stables, storage, and the cellar. The barn is 61 by 54 feet and four stories high.

The Pelster housebarn has long been known to scholars and is included in Charles van Ravenswaay's epic survey, The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements of Missouri. In 1978 the Missouri State Historical Survey placed the building on the National Register of Historic Places.

University of Missouri research for the 1983 exhibition, including interviews with 79-year-old Alfred Pelster, solved the riddle of the housebarn's sources. The community's history was grasped, moving beyond material culture to local lore and family photograph albums. The original Pelster farm was visited, several miles east of the housebarn, and the mystery came unlocked with study of the sources for the two major aspects of the Pelster housebarn--its half-timber construction method and its physical layout.

On that original farm, laid out by William Pelster's father, Phillip Friedrich Pelster (1793-1873), in the early 1840s (with young William's

help) are two pioneer German buildings that help solve the 50-year puzzle of the building's origins.

First, there is Phillip Pelster's 1840s half-timbered house that shows the same construction methods and details as the housebarn his son William built later. The heavy timber framing system forms a rigid box of sills, posts, braces, girts, plates, and studs hewn square with a broad axe and joined with wooden pegs ("square" pegs driven through "round" holes securing the mortise and tenon joints). The massive oak framework in the housebarn is like the one William Pelster had helped his parents erect at the home place for the Fachwerk house that still stands.

Half-timbering is heavy frame construction but with the spaces between the grid of timbers filled in with nogging material, customarily of brick or wattle-and-daub in northern Germany but in Missouri blocks of native stone. The older heavy frames depended on fewer but very strong timbers to do the job of framework, and when using traditional methods of cleaving, hewing, the careful hand-sawing of naturally cured wood, the effect was lasting and impressive.

According to family tradition, the Pelsters lived first in a hewn "log cabin" situated on a slope on the east side of the farmstead. They probably built the cabin immediately upon settling and lived there until the half-timbered house was built a year or two later, just as was the custom among other settlers. For these Osnabruckers, Blockbau (log construction) was used initially (though they probably had little experience with it in northwest Germany) and then abandoned in favor of brick, stone, or Fachwerk houses--in contrast to the tendency among Anglo-American "southern" neighbors and among the French in Missouri to treat log construction as a permanent and suitable medium for homes. The half-timbered house is more British or American than German in its plan (a double-pen house), but it contains Germanic details--the construction mode, but perhaps even more the

solid stone foundation, the use of rafters to hang household belongings on, and the use of the lift area for storage rather than sleeping.

And second, there is the 66 by 41 foot log double-crib barn across the courtyard from the half-timbered dwelling. This barn displays a floorplan much like the one that William used later in the housebarn. The plan recollects German housebarns William knew as a youth before coming to Missouri with his parents in 1842. But it also recalls--more accurately--double-crib barns Pelster undoubtedly saw in his American neighborhood. The barn is made of logs hewn flat inside and out (joined by the V-notching corner method) and this construction, while common among Anglo-Americans, echoes Germanic Blockbau timber technology introduced to the American colonies in the late 17th century by German immigrants.

The physical correlation between the construction of the home place house and the housebarn is important, and the one was quite probably the model for the other. The physical connection between the floorplan of the home place double-crib barn and the floorplan of the housebarn is a fascinating thread to follow, but a weaker link between the two buildings than the construction. Furthermore, the striking feature of the housebarn--absent in the home place barn and absent from most of the European antecedent housebarns--is the distinctive banked stone basement. The hillside site and its characteristic banked configuration unite the housebarn with the many varieties of "Pennsylvania barns" and bank barns in other regions.

Fieldwork also confirmed that Pelster built a small log house for his first dwelling on his government land before the building of the housebarn. By following Alfred Pelster's directions and studying of the landscape, the foundation and archaeological remains of the building were located. It seems to have been a two-room rectangular dwelling built on the slope, with a typical German stone cellar beneath the northern, down-hill room. That

plan would reflect the layout of the half-timbered house on the old "home place" where William lived with his parents in earlier days.

Scholars do not agree, nor is there precise evidence to pinpoint the date of the housebarn's construction. Some researchers consider the date to be around 1855, a reasonable date based on material evidence. The same evidence could support a date of up to 25 years later, since heavy timber construction and the banked "double-crib" floorplan continued to be used in barns well into the late 19th century. Family history indicates construction either before the Civil War or just at war's end. Some accounts suggest that the housebarn's construction was started on the eve of the war in 1860, stalled during the war, and then the building finished after the war ended in 1866. County assessment records suggest a date at the end of the Civil War, around 1866 or 1867, and whether or not its construction began earlier, the housebarn was very likely completed at the end of the war. Further research might confirm an exact date of construction, but it is safe to place this in the years from 1855 to 1870.

#### 4. The Pelster Housebarn as Image: Observation on the Drama of German-American Building

William Pelster, a traditional builder with a creative spark, may have simply put the ancient pieces back together: the housebarn layout (with the added feature of building into the bank) and the venerable half-timber construction tradition.

If this is so, he made the judgment to reiterate the housebarn concept. The trend among conservative German-Americans was to reject the concept (assuming they were familiar with it), but Pelster chose to revive it. His decision appears to have been a personal matter and not part of any

revivalistic trend among German-Americans in Missouri. A modified reconstitution of the old form of shelter was a powerful statement of his feelings as well as his idea for appropriate architecture. And the relative geographic isolation of Pelster's Bauernhof away from the beaten path was an enabling factor. While he became an able farmer and prospered on the tough Ozark soil, construction of the Germanic building was no accident but a re-establishment of a European architectural mode. And in looking for reasons for the construction of this unusual building, perhaps Alfred Pelster's comment suffices. His grandfather built it simply "because that's the way they built them in Germany." William Pelster, however, may have been motivated by the desire for tighter security and control over his stock and possessions, which the housebarn form provided. Furthermore, Pelster had lost his first wife while living in the original log house, and grandson Alfred Pelster thinks that his Grandpa believed he might have "better luck" if a new and different "house" was built for his next wife and family.

Could Pelster's housebarn really be viewed as a search backward to Germanic traditions for sustenance, rather than to his new "English" neighbors? It can be speculated that this is at least partly the case.

The half-timbering construction strengthens this theory. Half-timbering could be thought of as a denial of evolving American ways by use of this technique instead of American balloon frame construction that was available and replacing older construction methods by the time of the housebarn's erection. Half-timbering reminds visitors that this is a German building, but it shares many features with British and Anglo-American heavy timber framing traditions, suggesting steady flow of ideas between Germanic and British peoples. It is notable that the half-timbered walls are not visible from outside the barn. The structure was covered at the time of construction with lapped horizontal weatherboarding just like Anglo-American

houses. Horizontal lapped weatherboarding is exceedingly rare on Missouri barns, and none has been recorded in my studies of Anglo-American farms in Missouri; horizontal lapped weatherboarding occurs occasionally on Germanic farms. The customary barn skin in Missouri is made of flush vertical boards with narrow battens nailed over the boards' junctions. It appears that William Pelster intended his Fachwerk building to look like a weatherboarded frame building, in keeping with the American convention.

Many modern people hold half-timbered buildings in reverence. Their esteem is based on their memorial qualities as reminders of earlier days whether of "Merry Olde England" or Germany. In the case of half-timbered buildings in which the "panels" are exposed and whitewashed to contrast with the dark and heavy wood timbers, this evocative architecture has taken hold of the American imagination. We have only to look around us to see buildings going up with fake half-timbering--on a drugstore, an apartment complex, an interstate highway restaurant.

Yet, while this housebarn seems technically Germanic, it is also "American." Pelster was a practical man who sought the latest American improvements in agriculture and technology. For example, in addition to using new American agricultural equipment, although the Diele (central hall) was provided with a traditional wooden threshing floor, there is no evidence that it was ever used for grain threshing; American mechanical threshing machinery was readily available to Pelster. His innovations included the first mechanical corn binder in the area, the housebarn's sheet metal roof (the first in Franklin County, laid over the original wood shingles), and the application of yellow paint to the exterior (half-timbered houses here are traditionally white, sometimes with the exposed framing timbers painted dark red for contrast). There is the integral front porch on the house section of the housebarn, an American feature coming to widespread use by

midcentury, and Pelster used modern double-hung sash windows rather than casement windows typical of German houses.

So the resulting building is a "Germanic housebarn" that is as much American as German. It symbolizes the combination of the Old World traditions blending together with American ideas in the settling of the Midwest.

The process of deciding how one's house or barn should look and work is not simple. For this man who had affection for his German family history and who could recall the cultural landscape of the old country, his decision led to an unusual shelter for his community in rural Missouri. There were probably no other housebarns in Franklin County. His decision was based on memory and perhaps an interest in having a "barn" that would give satisfaction and pride as well as to security for family, livestock, and harvest.

## 5. Conclusion

The Pelster housebarn contributes to our knowledge of the cultural landscape, architectural history, dynamics of immigration, and selection of an American way of life. Its place in the rural Missouri vernacular environment attests both to the creativity and to the strength of tradition felt by many Europeans. Pelster stood between two worlds. And far from being a typical farmer, Grandpa Pelster emerges as a person concerned about his ethnic heritage and his success as a German-American.

As the echo of Continental housebarns, the Pelster housebarn strongly connects, in its site arrangement, layout, and construction techniques, to countless European antecedents. And it is the embodiment of the good fit between architecture and the land that is often a feature in traditional rural culture.

Thus the Pelster housebarn is an artifact of extraordinary value in understanding how a German immigrant, a man who was a creative tinkerer, gradually became an American farmer. As object, the housebarn represents the ultimate achievement on the Ozark frontier of a form of shelter with tough old roots. As image, it has symbolic power not only for Missourians who appreciate it as old ways in the new world, but also for those who understand it as a product of German craft of outstanding quality. For the community, the old housebarn is a reminder of a heritage now almost lost, and the building has become a monument to the ethnic artistic past.

The study of housebarns reminds us Americans that immigrants often found pleasure and purpose in maintaining old patterns, patterns that may seem out of tune with "American" conditions. It is the unique value of local projects that they produce case studies to illuminate broad historical issues as well as the dynamics of creativity within custom and history.

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SUMMARY VIEW: SYMPOSIUM ON GERMAN AMERICAN AGRICULTURE  
AND FOLK CULTURE

by

HOWARD W. KERR, JR.\*

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be with you today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the symposium, the presented papers, and the exhibit. Hearing and seeing the outstanding work accomplishments and contributions to the community of the Missouri Pelsters over several generations makes me proud to be a part of America's agricultural industry. Also, I am proud that my children, just like those of Phillip Pelster, carry in their blood some German genes. My wife's grandmother immigrated from Germany to America around 1900 and although she did not marry a farmer, her granddaughter did; a part-time farmer. My wife, Carole, and I are small farmers and our son is a third year student at the University of Maryland, majoring in agriculture. Thus, to some degree, he follows in the pathways of the Missouri Pelsters; a German-American in agriculture.

In reflecting for just a moment, I think of Thomas Jefferson and his philosophy about people, land, and agriculture. The Pelsters were the kind of people in which Jefferson certainly would have had complete confidence. In the past, now, and in the future, America needs to foster the leadership and contributions of similar people who believe in self.

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The papers and comments we heard are indeed indicative of America as we all see it today. In the culture of America, however, you have to look beyond the window ledge and outward across the plains. The inquisitive person eager for knowledge will travel the backroads and pathways that lead to hidden places and there you find people just like those who once worked the fields and filled the lofts and rooms of the German housebarn. The buildings have taken a different shape, yet they evolve around a central theme of an agricultural heritage--the family, the community, and the struggle to survive.

Dr. Douglas Bowers, in his paper, provides an interesting, lucid, historical analysis of the rich heritage of German farm immigrants in America and their contributions to American agriculture. His well documented paper will stand as a valuable source of information.

The excellent presentation of Dr. Howard Marshall is very easy to summarize, "he showed us." Dr. Marshall is from Missouri and his slide presentation conveyed the true meaning of the statement, that "a picture is worth a thousand words," therefore, little can I say.

His paper and slides presented details commonly missed by people who travel the main highways. For example, "the building of a barn is no haphazard process," and "a housebarn is a single structure combining residence and many work activities of the family farm." Pelster, Marshall, and family farmers of today all have a common linkage. They all were (or are) concerned with shelter and the production of flora and fauna. It is life and a contribution to the betterment of society.

Marshall recognized that in the past many early American farmers failed to comply for many reasons with the European tradition of utilizing a housebarn, The most significant, however, was the abundance of land in

America--an attribute rarely enjoyed by their forefathers in European agriculture. One must remember small farms have always dominated agriculture in Europe and, early in her history, America too was a country of small-self sufficient farm families. Quickly, however, the abundance of cheap and available land and the ever beckoning of distant horizons lured many enterprising new farm families of varied ethnic backgrounds into new regions of America to settle and work the land. Those adventurous individuals planted the seeds, which germinated, bore fruit, and yielded economic returns to the farmers. Today, however, our greatest reward lies in the works of these pioneers whose heritage has given America world leadership in agriculture. William Pelster, a German-American whose housebarn and lifestyle have been discussed, was one of those original planters of seed. His progeny and philosophy on life have survived and, I suspect, that future generations of agrarians will carry on this tradition.

It is interesting to note that during the same decade when Alfred Pelster's grandfather, William, built his housebarn in Franklin County, Missouri, President Abraham Lincoln on May 15, 1862, signed a bill that established the Department of Agriculture. Then, just as it is today, agriculture was the foundation for America's greatness and was considered by some people as the major industry of opportunity. The bill President Lincoln signed was just one of three designed to serve the interests of the family farmer. The other two were the Homestead Act and the Land-Grant College Act.

Those immigrants who landed on the shores of America and traveled westward across the Alleghenies through Kentucky and into Missouri often faced challenge upon challenge, but always perceived new opportunities

ahead. One only has to read a few passages from Rolvaag's Giants In The Earth or Howe's The Story of a Country Town, to know how real, difficult, and sometimes even rewarding, those challenges were.

This symposium and the wonderful exhibit celebrate a unique German "housebarn" in rural Missouri as well as the German-American family farm. However, what are we really talking about today? In a broader sense we are talking about one family of the more than 40 million foreign born people who came to the United States for the purpose of establishing new homes and new lives. In particular, the immigrants who came to America to farm as a livelihood were enticed by cheap land and the absence of feudal restrictions such as entail or primogeniture. The Homestead Act of 1862 and the sale by railroads of their land grants that provided continued inducement for immigrants to make a new life for themselves on the American frontier were also factors.

The earliest immigrants were predominantly British in origin; however, from the advent of nationhood to the end of the nineteenth century, the influx of immigrants came not only from England but also from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Scotland, Ireland, and Germany.

During the 1830's and 40's German (Hannoverian) immigrants found the eastern Missouri landscape appealing for agriculture. For the Pelster family in particular, Missouri became their "garden of Eden"--a land offering them jobs, hard work, opportunity for entrepreneurship, and the continuation of the family farm tradition.

For those of you who cannot travel to Missouri to experience the German-American family farm first hand, I have good news. Just look around you as you travel from one rural community to the next and in all areas of the country. Those founding family farmers of America, the

Pelsters (and others like them), are mirrored in many small family farms that landscape the countryside. Contrary to the belief of some people, the American small farm has not gone the route of the dinosaur. Today, the small family farm lives and their numbers are increasing. The old German heritage of determination, the ethic of hard work, and a will to achieve are clearly reflected in the recent press release (August 1984) of the 1982 Census of Agriculture. The number of small farms in the United States jumped sharply between 1978 and 1982. Farms of less than 50 acres totaled 637,000 in 1982--this is up 17 percent from 1978 when the count was 543,000. The fact that the small farms increased by more than 94,000 in a short 4 year span of time is truly significant.

The lure of agriculture has always been strong in Missouri. Its people have tilled small farms in the past, do so today and, I suspect, will continue to farm in the future. Agriculture for many is a folklore. Frequently, seeds and planting traditions have been passed along from one generation of farmers to the next.

Missouri has an excellent record in assisting small farm entrepreneurs. The Missouri Cooperative Extension Service is recognized as one of America's bellwether states providing leadership to small farm families. Missouri pioneered the use of paraprofessionals (1976) to aid small farm operators. Recently, the University of Missouri CES sponsored a Small and Part-time Farmer Workshop at Troy, Missouri. Topics covered included livestock, crops, forage, tree fruit, and small fruit production on small acreage.

Perhaps it is appropriate that in closing I mention some new books. A year or so ago I had the pleasure, along with many others, to read a new book, Blue Highways, a journey into America by William Least Heat Moon. He

was inspired to write his novel after losing his job in a college in Missouri. Searching for new horizons, he got a half-ton Ford van, packed a few necessities, and set out to follow the track of various ancestors and write a book about America. He wrote a "top 10" best seller. It is magnificent. Folklore, agriculture, and small farm families are liberally sprinkled throughout his book. He begins on page 1 with a good example; "That morning, before all the news started hitting the fan, Eddie Short Leaf, who worked a bottomsland section of the Missouri River and plowed snow off campus sidewalks, told me if the deep cold didn't break soon the trees would freeze straight up through and explode." Indeed, another Missouri part-time small farmer! The Pelsters, the housebarn, and accompanying bits of folklore, are reflected frequently by scenes, time, and places in Blue Highways.

Another new book entitled Gaining Ground - The Renewal of America's Small Farms by J. Tevere MacFadyen echoes the American folklore of agriculture and the determination of people to farm. Be assured, the steadfast spirit of those early German immigrants, the Pelsters, to farm and build a successful community in America, lives on, even today.

OUR RURAL GERMAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE: A SELECTIVE LIST OF ARTICLES

(alphabetically arranged by title)

Compiled by

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Assistant Chief for Special Collections

National Agricultural Library

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# THE PELSTER HOUSEBARN: A GERMAN-AMERICAN REMEMBRANCE OF THE OLD COUNTRY

by

MARILYN M. JACOBS\*

"The German Housebarn in America: Object and Image" opened on September 24, 1984, at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland. The dedication ceremony began with the popping of corks and rousing German music. The little-known story of a unique architectural form, the German housebarn and its place in 19th century rural America, was depicted in graphic detail.

Through photos, artifacts, and descriptive narratives, the exhibit explored the history of the housebarn as it reflects the life and cultural landscape of the Missouri-German immigrant experience. A reconstructed portion and model of the original structure were displayed along with farm and home implements depicting agricultural practices of the time, family history, and community life.

Here follows a collection of photos from this delightful occasion. The National Agricultural Library is proud to have played a role in bringing this cultural legacy to the attention of the American public.

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Wayne Rasmussen, Historian, USDA, Economics Research Service, chaired the Symposium and introduced the program speakers at exhibit ceremony.

"The Pelster Housebarn: A German-American Landmark in Missouri" was presented by Howard "Rusty" Marshall, Director and Associate Professor of Art History, Missouri Cultural Heritage Center, Columbia, Missouri, at the Symposium on German-American Agriculture and Folk Culture.



Nancy Pierce, President, The German Heritage Society of Greater Washington, D.C., was a keynote speaker at the dedication ceremony.



More than 100 guests and visitors were on hand for the dedication ceremony and symposium. The time allotted for the celebration was extended due to the acute interest of the participants.



Members of "The Continentals" provided festive German folk music for the enjoyment of all in attendance. They graciously played on until the guests had departed.



Barry Bergey (center), Missouri Cultural Heritage Center, talks informally with visitors about the four-level floor plan of a typical housebarn depicted in the scale model on display.



Glenn Grannemann examines the Grannemann Store ledger on display. Purchases made by a descendent (L. Grannemann) in 1887 showed that oats came to \$6.40; butter, 78¢; molasses, 10¢; and chickens, 25¢.



'Social Life', one of the 13 panels on display. M. Pelster remembers dances in the housebarn featuring an accordeon player and violinist, playing waltzes, polkas, and 'twists' (a spinning couples dance). Work itself was an occasion for social activity, as exemplified by the community involvement in quilting bees, barn-raising, and threshing.



A special exhibit on "Early German Agricultural Practices" from NAL's rare book collection was also on display. Farm artifacts, such as the barn pulley shown above, were provided by the Blue Ridge Institute, Ferrum, Virginia.



Established in 1869, Buescher's world famous corn cob pipe was ever present in the growth and development of America, giving many hours of pleasure to the pioneer as well as to statesmen. Such famous men as General Pershing, General MacArthur, H.L. Mencken, and Fiorella La Guardia are known to have been users of the corn cob pipe.



Partaking of refreshments and exchanging information are (from left to right) Rusty Marshall, Missouri Cultural Heritage Center; Joe Howard, Director of the National Agricultural Library; Alan Jabbour, American Folk Life Center, Library of Congress; and Wendel Allen, Missouri State Society. Refreshments were donated by the Edelweiss Winery and Bardenheirs Wine Cellars of Missouri, local merchants, and the Associates NAL, Inc.



Attendees were presented with complimentary corn cob pipes provided by Buescher's of Washington, Missouri. Ordinary corn grown primarily for its grain did not provide the ideal cob for the pipe industry. In 1950, Dr. Marcus Zuber, a geneticist at USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Columbia, Missouri, developed a hybrid corn with a big, thick, tough cob, as well as a high yield of grain used for milling purposes. The result was Missouri Pipe No. 14, still in use today.









